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THE STORY OF THE FAKE GRAVE STELE (KHACHKAR) OF THE DAUGHTER OF HASAN JALAL IN THE KARABAKH MONASTERY OF GANDZASAR

Photo-history of the appearance and disappearance of a fake khachkar is traced in Armenian web publications.

The 13th-century Albanian monastery of Gandzasar was subjected to barbaric alterations after the occupation of Karabakh by Armenian separatists in the early 1990s, with the aim of introducing visible evidence of its Armenian origin. Before the occupation of Karabakh, the monastery was known as the Cathedral of Caucasian Albania, built by order and with funds from the Grand Albanian Prince Hasan Jalal, ruler of the Khachin region. The Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan has included the monastery in the list of state-protected monuments of "universal significance".

In the early 2000s, the restoration and reconstruction of the temple was announced in occupied Karabakh. The restoration work was financed by Russian businessman of Armenian origin Levon Ayrapetyan. But the old Albanian Church did not quite correspond to the Armenian church canon. There was a need for some changes and additions to the interior decoration of the church. As a result of these alterations, the altar and narthex of the Church of St. John the Baptist were changed in accordance with the Armenian church tradition. The facing tiles of the interior walls and floors were replaced with tiles made of tufa stone, specially brought from Armenia. Then, new inscriptions were added to the wall lined with these slabs, indicating the Armenian origin of the temple. Next, a wall that did not originally exist was built around the monastery, and finally, additional gravestones were laid in the monastery courtyard and a grave stele (khachkar) was installed on a cement foundation. Tombstones and khachkars, of course, had Armenian inscriptions and were previously artificially aged with chemical and organic oxidizers. The new wooden doors of the church's narthex, with images of saints, made in accordance with Armenian church iconography, were subjected to the same forced aging.

The most valuable tombstone of the monastery, after the original tombstone of Hasan Jalal, in the Church's narthex, was declared by the separatists to be the tomb stele (khachkar) of his daughter, Mina Khatun, in the monastery courtyard, near the wall of the Church's narthex. On the stele - khachkar, it is written in Armenian script: "I, Hasan, son of Vakhtang, erected this cross [in memory] of my daughter Khatun and on behalf of her mother, the queen - the daughter of King Baghka." The tombstone khachkar appeared unexpectedly, quietly, without any of the sensation that usually accompanies finds of such significance. It was not possible to find information in Armenian sources about who, when and where the previously unknown tombstone of Hasan Jalal's daughter was found. However, on the day of the church's consecration after its restoration (2002), the stele had already appeared in the monastery's courtyard.

There is no mention of this khachkar in the most authoritative reference book on Armenian khachkars, published in Armenia before the occupation of Karabakh (Yakobson A.L. Armenian khachkars, "Hayastan", Yerevan 1986). The book contains photographs of

khachkars in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. But the khachkar-stele of the daughter of Hasan Jalal from the Gandzasar Cathedral is still missing from the book. No – because the book was published before the occupation of Karabakh and reflects the khachkars that actually survived at that time.

Photographs of the monastery published by the Armenians themselves on web resources indicate that the khachkar stele appeared in the monastery courtyard as a result of "restoration" work in 2000-2002. In the 18 years following this restoration, the Gandzasar Monastery was included by Armenian separatists in the mandatory tourist route for foreigners visiting Karabakh. During the tour of the monastery, the fake tombstone (khachkar) of Hasan Jalal's daughter was given great propaganda value. During the Second Karabakh War, before the advance of the Azerbaijani army, the fake khachkar gravestone was hastily dismantled and taken to Armenia. At the site where the false gravestone once stood, no burial was ever discovered... No comment!!!

The appearance of a fake khachkar stele of Hasan Jalal's daughter in the monastery courtyard can be traced back to Armenian publications of photographs of the monastery complex during the occupation of Karabakh. These photographs are freely available and, without any words, testify to the mysterious appearance and equally mysterious disappearance of the fake gravestone cross of the daughter of the Albanian Prince Hasan Jalal – Mina Khatun – in the Albanian monastery of Gandzasar. How can one not recall the similarly "theatrical" story of the fake khachkars in the bell tower of another Karabakh monastery – Dadivank. And again, all that remains is to finish this story with the words: "Finita La Commedia"! 😊

Sources

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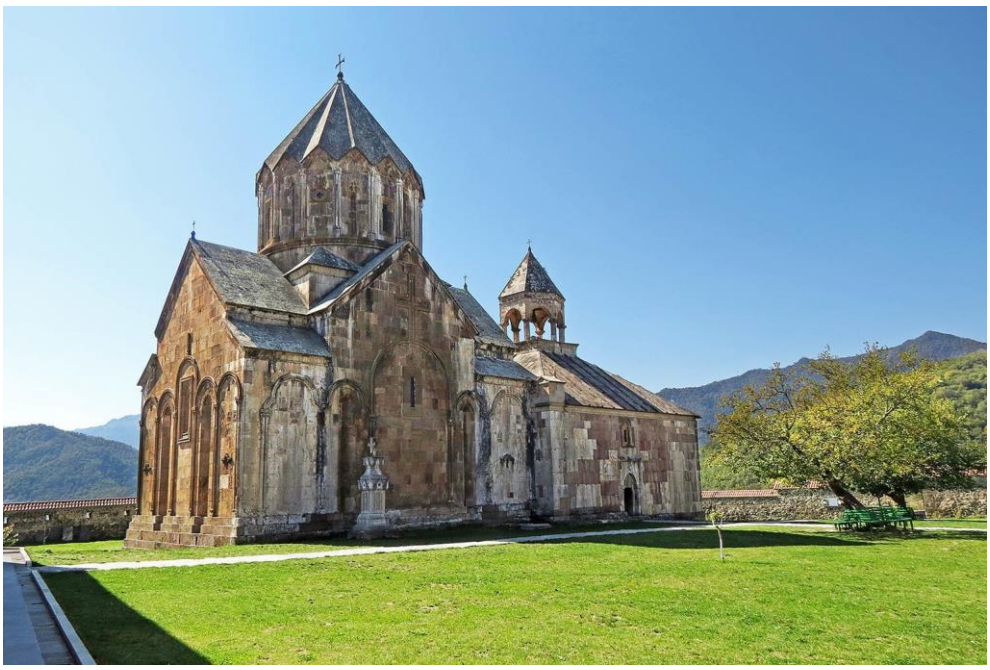
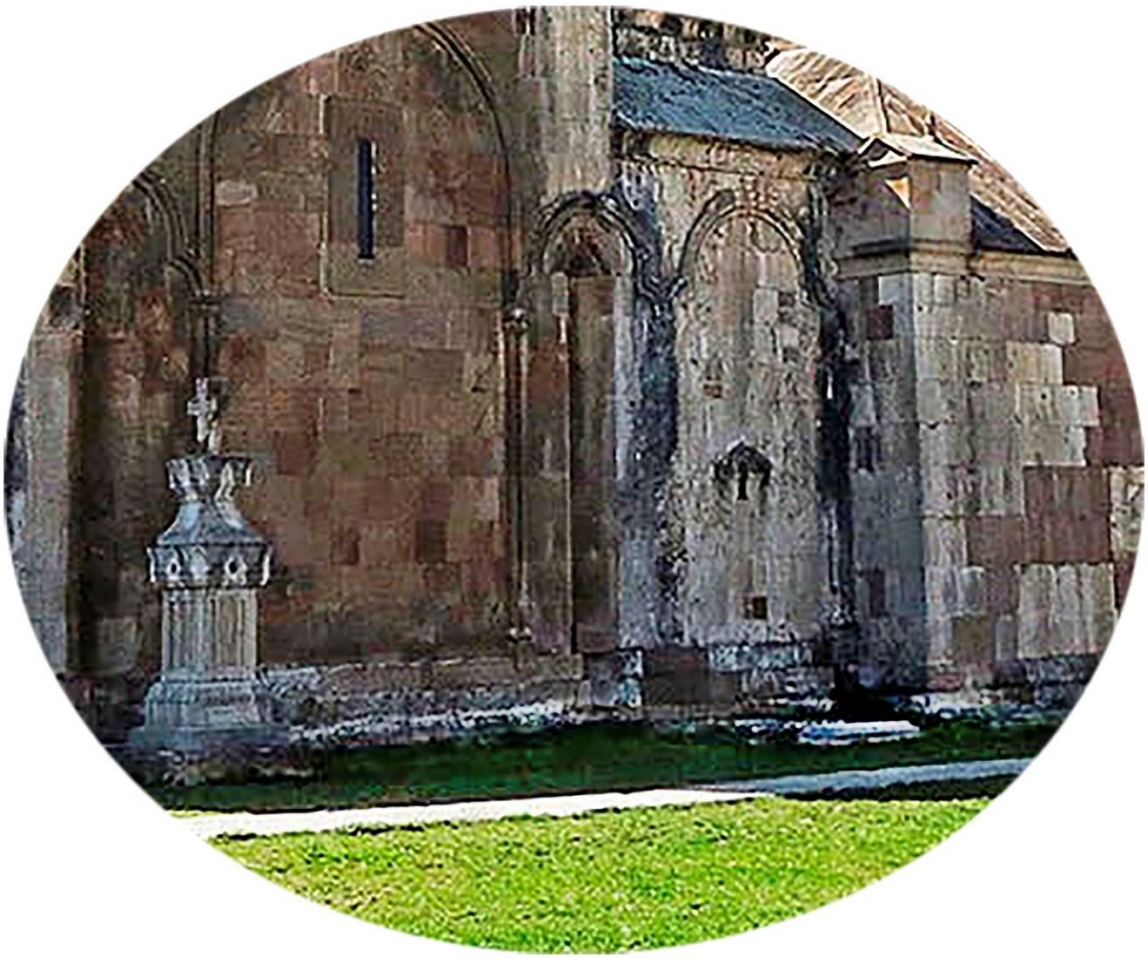
Photo illustrations



A photo of the Gandzasar Monastery before the burial stele (khachkar) of the daughter of the Grand Duke of Albania, Hasan Jalal, was placed in its courtyard. (Photo from Armenian web source)



A photo of the Gandzasar Monastery before the burial stele (khachkar) of the daughter of the Grand Duke of Albania, Hasan Jalal, was placed in its courtyard. (Detail)

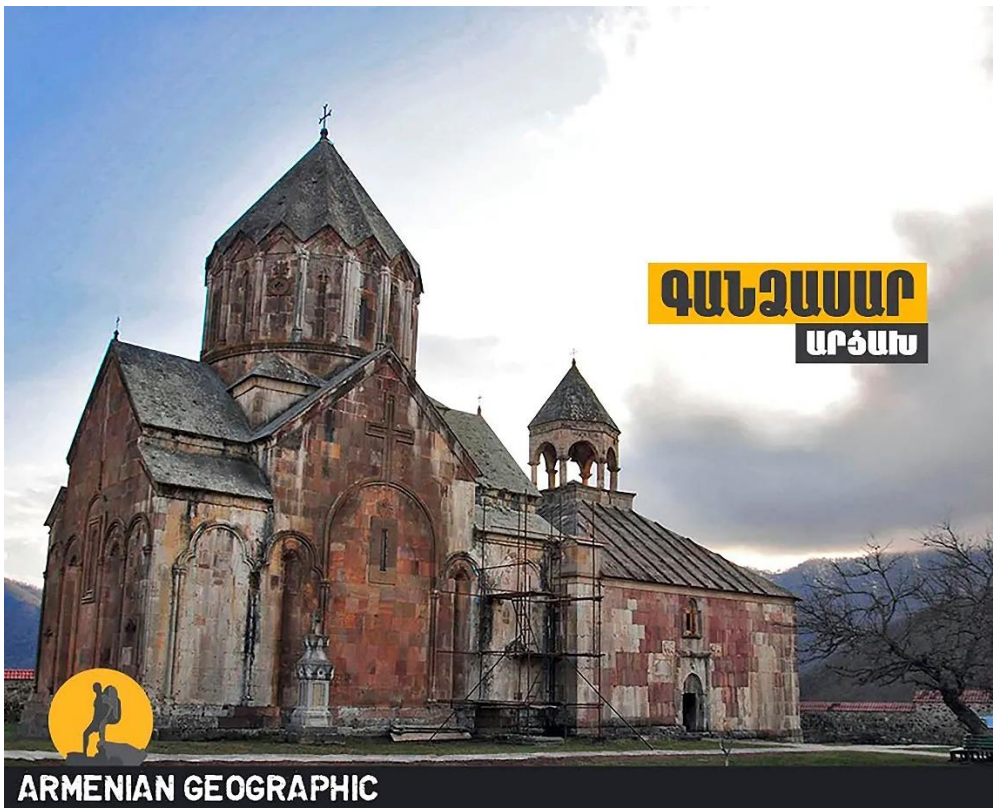


Photo of the Gandzasar Monastery before the burial stele (khachkar) of Hasan Jalal, the daughter of the Grand Duke of Albania, was erected in its courtyard. (Photo from Armenian web source)

Photo of the Gandzasar Monastery before the burial stele (khachkar) of Hasan Jalal, the daughter of the Grand Duke of Albania, was erected in its courtyard. (Detail)

Photo of the Gandzasar Monastery before the burial stele (khachkar) of Hasan Jalal, the daughter of the Grand Duke of Albania, was erected in its courtyard. (Armenian web source)

Photo of the Gandzasar Monastery before the burial stele (khachkar) of Hasan Jalal, the daughter of the Grand Duke of Albania, was erected in its courtyard. (Detail)

Khachkar with a false inscription:
"In the name of Hasan Jalal
and dedicated to his daughter"
(Armenian web source)

An identical khachkar from the cemetery
of the Gandzasar Monastery

A fresh, fake inscription contrasts with the authentic part of the khachkar.
(Photo from Armenian web source)

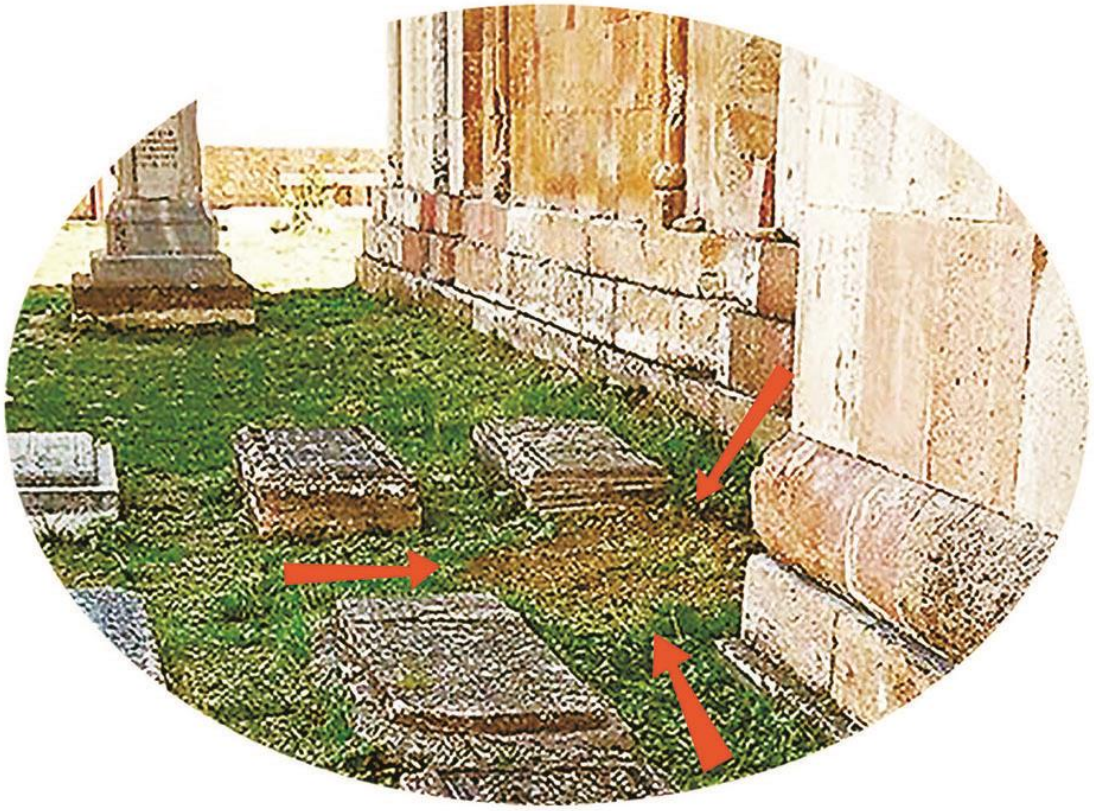
Following criticism from monastery parishioners, the fake inscription was covered with paint to make the falsification less obvious (Photo from Armenian web source)

Another photo from the same period: The fake inscription is covered with paint imitating the aged patina of the stone. (Photo from Armenian web source)

In 2002, restoration work was completed, and a false stele (khachkar) was installed near the wall of the narthex of the Church of St. John the Baptist. (Photo from Armenian web source)

A fake stele (khachkar) belonging to Hasan Jalal's daughter was installed near the wall of the narthex of the Church of St. John the Baptist. (Photo from Armenian web source)

2020. Due to the Azerbaijani army's advance, the fake khachkar was dismantled by Armenian separatists and taken to Armenia. (Photo from Armenian web source)



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A still from an Azerbaijani video of the Monastery after the liberation of Karabakh.
The fake khachkar of Hasan Jalal's daughter with an Armenian inscription is gone, just as it never existed before the Armenian occupation of Karabakh.

Finita La Commedia! 😊